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ABSTRACT

An 11th-grade interdisciplinary course combining English and American history examines United States history from the perspective of nine topics, rather than through the traditional, chronological-survey approach. Discovery learning and independent research are the focus of course method. At the start of the course, students are given nine hypotheses relating to American history which they are required to either prove or disprove throughout the course of the year. An example of such an hupothesis is "The majority of the presidents of the United States have been elected on the basis of personal appeal rather than political philosophy." Students then develop an understanding of the nature of hypothesis formation and learn to work independently, budget their time, evaluate information, draw conclusions, define positions both orally and in written form, and assume group leadership. Because of these high expectations, only students from the top 11 percent of their class are eligible. Students gather data through independent research and present their conclusions in a final report. Teacher and library assistance is available throughout each research project for gathering appropriate data and finding resources. As a result of this program, two spin-off courses have been developed for other social studies classes. Each of these three innovative programs involves extensive teacher cooperation and team effort. (Author/JR)

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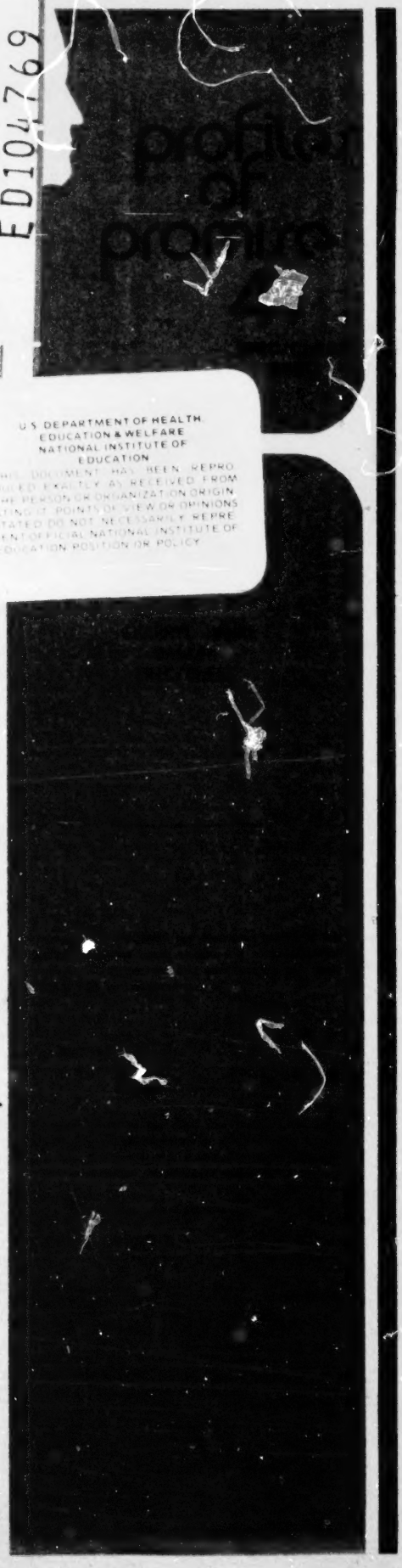

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American History and English

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DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM

After the first day of American history class, an eleventh grader at Helena High School, Helena, Montana, was heard to remark, "Well, at least we didn't start with old Louis today." For this student and others who have come to believe that all American history classes begin with Christopher Columbus and end with the Vietnam War (time permitting), Helena's American History and English Developmental Program A offers a refreshing change of pace.

The program at Helena was begun by Homer Loucks, the school's principal, in 1967. As a former social studies teacher, Loucks was concerned that the American history taught at the eleventh grade level was essentially a repeat, albeit more sophisticated, of the American history courses students completed in elementary and junior high school. He envisioned a course that would offer students something more than another survey of American history.

The result of Loucks's thinking was the American History and English Developmental/Program A, or D/A as it is abbreviated. Rather than the traditional chronological approach, D/A examines American history from the perspective of nine topics. D/A has a combined focus on English and social studies and is taught in two-hour blocks. Discovery learning and independent research are two hallmarks of the program. Don Byrd, one of the present D/A teachers, believes the program offers a challenging approach to history. In his view, "Watching students discover authentic American historical concepts--some for the first time--makes a course exciting."

AMERICAN HISTORY IN NINE HYPOTHESES

The content of D/A sets the tone for the course. In designing the course structure, Loucks divided American history into nine content areas and constructed an hypothesis for each area. The nine hypotheses are as follows:

1. The majority of the presidents of the United States have been elected on the basis of personal appeal rather than political philosophy.
2. The wars in which the United States has engaged have been the results of economic pressure rather than political philosophy or national ideology.
3. Private enterprise was chiefly responsible for the territorial expansion of the United States.
4. The literature, art, and music of the time reflect the social conscience of the people.
5. Geographic location determines, to a major extent, the political philosophy of the people; or, what men do determines the type of government men create.
6. The United States Constitution was made flexible by pressure and necessity rather than by intent.
7. Communication is the foundation of nationalism.
8. The fiscal policy of the federal government dictates economic growth and development.
9. American foreign policy has been created through response to situations and crises rather than through national ideology.

It is the responsibility of each student in a D/A class to individually prove or disprove all nine hypotheses. In addition, the class as a whole develops a proof or disproof representing the majority opinion of the group. The right to dissenting or concurring opinions is recognized.

Because there are many skills involved in approaching history through hypothesis testing, D/A is taught as an interdisciplinary English-social studies course. Originally the social studies teacher on the team was responsible for outlining the hypotheses, supplying historical fact sheets, providing guidance in content areas, and evaluating proofs. The English teacher on the team specialized in helping students develop research skills, providing direction in writing and speaking, and evaluating the communication quality of students' work. At the present time, Helena High School has two teachers with certification in both English and social studies, so these teachers direct the D/A classes and are responsible for both the English and social studies aspects of the course.

The expectations for students in D/A are high. Participants must first develop an understanding of the nature of hypothesis formation. They then learn to work independently, budget time, evaluate information, draw conclusions, define positions both orally and in written form, and assume group leadership. Because of these high expectations, only students in the top ten percent of the Helena High School junior class are eligible for D/A. There are approximately 22 students per class in a typical year.

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HYPOTHESES: PROVE OR DISPROVE

Once students are presented with one of the nine hypotheses, they spend approximately a month proving or disproving the contention. When a new hypothesis is introduced, the teacher first presents the topic then focuses attention on the important aspects of the subject. The following day, students receive definitions of important terms, bibliographies of useful resources, and fact sheets which highlight some of the historical facts pertinent to the topic. On the third day, "buzz" sessions are held by groups of students to brainstorm various approaches to the hypothesis.

For the next week or more, students are primarily engaged in individual research, with teachers providing help when needed or requested. The school librarian plays an important role in D/A by helping students learn to use library resources in their research and by working with D/A teachers to add new library resources for the D/A course.

Halfway through the month's work on a topic, students submit a rough draft of their research to that point. From these drafts, teachers make suggestions to help students complete their project. The remainder of the month is used by students to complete missing information in their research, draw conclusions, and prepare a presentation of their work.

Final presentations take a variety of forms. Sometimes students prepare written reports of 20 to 30 pages in length. In these reports students detail their research and explain their proof or disproof of the hypothesis. Students may also make oral presentations, either individually or in a group, in which they defend their findings. Audio-visual presentations--both slide/tape shows and 8 mm films--have also been used as culminating activities.

The emphasis in all final presentations is on the valid use of information, rather than on right and wrong answers. Virginia Lucht, D/A teacher, enjoys this aspect of the course. "It's exciting to watch the class discover that many 'facts' are really only opinions, that they cannot believe everything they read, and that there are two sides or more to every issue."

Each topic varies in the kind of subject matter it explores. The topic of foreign policy is presented here as an example of the content covered in D/A studies. On the fact sheets given to students for this topic, the following subjects are examined:

- Declaration of Independence
- Washington's Farewell Address
- Monroe Doctrine
- Open Door Policy
- Big Stick Diplomacy
- Dollar Diplomacy, Wilsonian Diplomacy
- Good Neighbor Policy
- Hoover-Stimson Doctrine, Neutrality Acts 1935-1941
- Truman Doctrine
- Eisenhower Doctrine
- Nixon Doctrine

Students are given direction in dealing with each subject. For example, in studying Wilsonian Diplomacy (1913-1921), students are directed to consider Wilson's denouncing dollar diplimacy in Latin America and China, the opening of the Panama Canal, U.S. military intervention in various areas, the U.S. purchase of the Virgin Islands, Pershing's expedition into Mexico, and the U.S. declaration of war on Germany.

In addition to the content fact sheets, students are provided with a list of resources which can be used in their research. When available, audio-visual materials or special documents are presented to students. Thus, while students are required to do considerable independent research, they are given some direction in their work.

EVALUATION

Criteria for evaluating student work in D/A courses is the responsibility of each teacher. Sometimes teachers base grades strictly on students' written work and ongoing contact with students. Objective tests based on the fact sheets provided with each topic are sometimes used, and teachers often emphasize oral presentations in their evaluations. Final grades are expressed in the letter grade form used in all Helena High classes.

Student response to the D/A approach is generally positive. Participants indicate that they like working in a one-to-one relationship with teachers, having the opportunity to express opinions, and sharing ideas with other students. Some students feel the course is "tough," especially the first topic, because it requires more independent work than they have done in past classes. Other students object to the repetition of procedure in dealing with each topic. Despite these criticisms most students consider the course worthwhile. Perhaps one student summed up the opinions of many students when he wrote, "Sure it was hard, but I do have to admit I learned a lot from it."

Brainstorming approaches to a new topic

Examining collected information

Sharing findings with an audio-visual presentation

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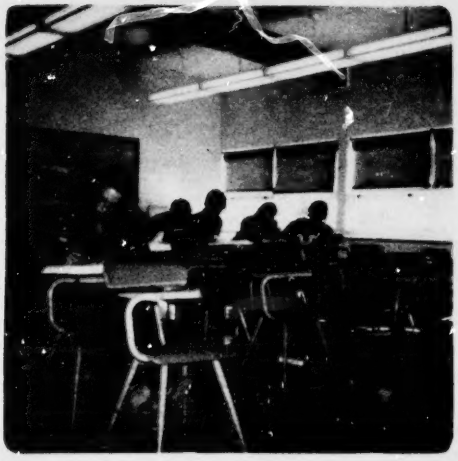
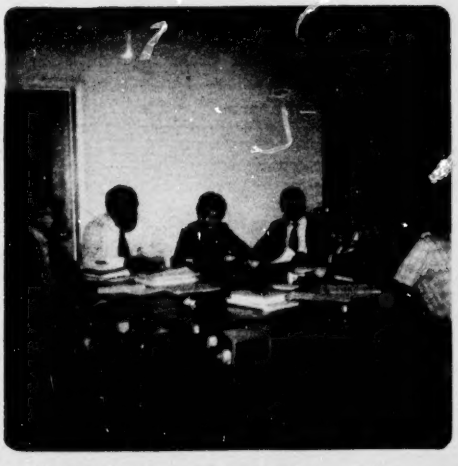


Compiling research data

Preparing final presentation



Staff planning a new developmental program

SPIN-OFFS

One important result of the original D/A program is the spin-offs it has produced at Helena High School. Based on the success of the Developmental A program for the highest achieving students, Loucks and the social studies staff designed two additional programs for other student populations.

In 1968, the Developmental B program (D/B) was begun for students in the middle range of academic achievement. The staff realized that these students could not work as independently as students in Developmental A, but they believed that many of the concepts from the original program could be adapted for average students.

Students in D/B participate in more directed activities than students in D/A. Teachers present clearly defined research assignments and give substantial direction in locating sources and organizing information. Students are divided into teams of three, and most work is done on a team basis. The nature of the research assignments allows students to finish their work in two weeks rather than a month, but, as in D/A, the final activity of each project is to draw conclusions and share findings with other students in the class. Teachers consider the sharing of information to be very important for the D/B students. It is a true opportunity for students to help themselves, and each other, to learn.

The second spin-off from D/A was the Developmental C program begun in 1968. This program is designed for students who have always had trouble in school and have not found academic work particularly appealing. There is an emphasis on people, places, and things, but not on textbook learning. Students are encouraged to learn through role-playing, simulation/games, hands-on experiences, and a variety of other "doing" activities. The Helena staff is presently evaluating the results of the D/C program and considering other strategies to incorporate into the course.

The social studies staff is now developing a program for the twelfth grade American government course which will parallel the approach taken in eleventh grade American history. The American government course will focus on topics such as "Why Government," "State and Local Government," "The Individual," "Great Dissenters," and "Public Opinion." Teachers are now working to coordinate the topics covered in American history with those to be explored in the new American government course.

KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM

In terms of innovative educational programs, Helena High School's developmental courses have had a long life span. During the seven years since the original program was begun, the staff has had time to evaluate, modify, and implement program changes. This evaluation process has helped maintain enthusiasm and vitality in the program.

At various times, a new topic or two has been substituted for one of the original nine topics. However, each time teachers have decided to return to the original nine, because they find these nine topics provide good coverage and sufficient depth for exploring American history at the eleventh-grade level. In each topic students have the option to focus on a particular aspect of the subject if they have a special interest they want to pursue.

While the topics have not changed much over the years, there have been activity modifications. For example, students are no longer required to write a paper at the end of every topic, although they still write several papers during the year. Teachers are making extensive use of new videotape equipment to record drama and role-playing activities. An important development has been the increased number of resource materials now available to students for their research.

Teachers feel a team effort is crucial in maintaining programs like Developmental A, B, and C. When two teachers were working together on a course, they found it necessary to have weekly work sessions to keep the course flowing smoothly. Although the social studies teacher generally took the lead in structuring the content of the course, the English teacher was the key figure in designing activities and methods for teaching specific skills such as written or oral communication. On a day-to-day basis, the teachers' responsibilities often overlapped and they tried to share an equal load in meeting individual needs.

Although no formal evaluation has been done on the effect of the course on students' later academic work, Helena teachers report that students from the Developmental A program who go on to college often return to Helena High and tell them that the methods and skills learned in the D/A course have been very helpful in their college work. Students in the D/B program indicate that the course has helped them in their other high school classes.

In a nontraditional program such as D/A, where the emphasis is not on facts *per se*, there is sometimes concern about students learning enough *core* information. The question is asked, "Are students learning the basic facts of American history that 'educated' people are expected to know?"

The Helena staff has two replies to this concern. One is that students who have reached the junior grade in high school have probably already acquired a reasonably extensive knowledge of basic American history facts. Repetition of such facts may or may not be helpful to them. Secondly, teachers have concluded from their experience in teaching the developmental programs that students who participate in the classes do continue to learn facts. In the developmental programs facts are learned in the process of studying history, but they are not learned as an end in themselves.

Robert Lawson, social studies teacher and facilitator at Helena High School, summarizes the school's developmental programs as follows:

Our American history programs are an attempt to allow today's student to view today's world with a perspective of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Our idea is not to plod through America's past, minute by miserable minute, but to move through American history with enthusiasm and purpose.

ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 083 163 through ED 083 167 - *Individualization of Instruction.* MF-$.75, HC-$1.50 each, plus postage. This is a series of five monographs, related to the issue of individualization of instruction. The individual documents focus on evaluation, flexible scheduling, continuous progress education, team teaching, and a rationale for individualizing instruction.

ED 071 929 - *Instructional Objectives Exchange.* American History, Grades 7-12. 63 pp. Available from Instructional Objectives Exchange, P. O. Box 24095, Los Angeles, California 90024 - $8.00. For teachers interested in developing American history courses based on specific objectives, this document contains 19 objectives and related evaluation items for American history, grades 7 through 12.

ED 087 642 - *America in the 20th Century, Grades 11-12, Course of Study. Project 1003.* 132 pp. MF-$.75, HC-$6.60, plus postage. Focusing on America from 1900 to the present, the major social, political, and economic developments in this century are presented in this course. A simulation list, two simulation games, a book, film, and audiovisual list conclude the guide.

For further information, write:

Robert Lawson
Helena High School
Helena, Montana 59601

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